

1840

A
SERMON,
PREACHED AT
FITZROY CHAPEL,
IN LONDON:

On Thursday the 29th. Day of November, 1798,

(Being the Day appointed for a general Thanksgiving to Almighty God for the late glorious victory obtained over the French Fleet, by His MAJESTY's Ships of War commanded by Real Admiral Lord Nelson of the Nile.)

BY THE
Rev. ROBERT ANTHONY BROMLEY, B. D.

MINISTER OF FITZROY CHAPEL, RECTOR OF
ST. MILDRED'S IN THE POULTRY, AND
LECTURER OF ST. JOHN'S HACKNEY.

DEDICATED TO

His GRACE the DUKE of PORTLAND,
KNIGHT OF THE MOST NOBLE ORDER OF THE GARTER,
AND ONE OF HIS MAJESTY'S PRINCIPAL
SECRETARIES OF STATE.

London.

Printed and Sold by J. Faulder, in Bond Street, Messrs.
Shepperson and Reynolds, Oxford Street.

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[PRICE ONE SHILLING.]

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TO THE MOST NOBLE

William Henry Cavendish Bentinck

DUKE of PORTLAND,

Knight of the most Noble Order of the Garter,



One of his Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State &c.

THE FOLLOWING DISCOURSE

IS MOST HUMBLY INSCRIBED

BY HIS GRACE'S

MOST DEVOTED

AND OBLIGED

HUMBLE SERVANT.

THE AUTHOR.

A SERMON, &c.

I. KINGS, CHAP. 20. VER. 11.

LET NOT HIM THAT GIRDETH ON HIS HARNESS
BOAST HIMSELF AS HE THAT PUTTETH IT OFF.

THE changes of war are ever various, and baffle all possible calculation. No powers or resources can ensure to any side the issue contended for, nor can any intervening events warrant to the strongest the final palm of victory over those, whose inferior strength they may despise. These considerations should teach all the nations of the earth a lesson, by which the evils of war would be greatly averted, and the happiness of the world promoted in the same proportion. Reflecting thus, they should ever be extremely cautious how they draw the sword, and never too confident when

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they have drawn it, that they shall see it sheathed with every advantage on which they counted in the outset. Thus that insolence, which is too apt to spring in unprincipled minds from partial successes, would be lost in the more prudent and amiable spirit of moderation, which never leaves peace at a vast distance from itself.

IF all the armies of the world be dependent on the supreme will of the Almighty, if he be the Lord of Hosts, and if his divine providence disposeth all things both in Heaven and Earth, those incalculable chances of war must ever be; and more especially if he be the God of peace, if he be that eternal and universal parent in whom all the families of the earth are taught to seek and to find a blessing, those measures of ambition, which tend only to make the world a field of blood, must ever be incapable of any sure calculation, and it will be found on such occasions that *the race is not* always *to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, any more than in private life *bread* will always come *to the wise*, or *riches* to those who may best understand the way to obtain them, or *favour* to those who may be thought most skilful in the arts of address. When the best human policy has founded it's schemes on the most considerate basis, and when the best appointed armies take the field to consummate what that policy has

has

has planned, a puny enemy who has apparently every thing to dread in the force with which he is menaced, may be well warranted to rebuke those menaces in the words of the king of Israel recorded in the Text, *let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.*

THE History of nations hardly furnishes an instance, in which the wisdom of that sententious observation, which the king of Israel sent as an answer to the threats of the king of Syria, could be seen more forcibly, or as affording a more encouraging lesson, than in the very dispiriting circumstances under which he then stood, whose words they are. In reviewing those circumstances we shall see an example, in which no career of success accompanied with oppressive insolence needs to intimidate the injured and oppressed, and to sink them in dependency, looking even at mere human means, and much more looking to the divine protection, if of that protection they be worthy. In those circumstances too we shall meet some things which may strike us the more, and make the lesson resulting from them more impressive, on account of their similarity with what has appeared in the conduct of our enemies, and in those oppressive demands which have marked their power wherever it has prevailed.

THE name of that king of Syria, to whom Ahab king of Israel sent that message, was Benhadad, who *gathered all his host together, his horses and his chariots, and with thirty two other kings in his alliance went up to besiege Samaria.* With what insolence of mind that expedition was conceived and undertaken, appeared in the first message sent by him to the king of Israel into the city, in these words, *thy silver and thy gold is mine, thy wives also, and thy children, even the goodliest are mine.* The king of Israel must have been naturally tame, or struck with a panic, when to such a message he returned the following submission, *my lord, O king, according to thy saying, I am thine, and all that I have.* Insolence always rises upon concession, and ever will rise more aggravated on such pusillanimous concessions as those. Accordingly the messengers came back again to Ahab with higher demands from Benhadad, saying in his name, *altho' I have sent unto thee demanding thy silver and thy gold, and thy wives, and thy children, yet I will send my servants to thee to morrow about this time, and they shall search thy house, and the houses of thy servants, and it shall be that whatsoever is pleasant in thine eyes, they shall put it in their hand, and take it away.* Here was insult beyond ordinary example added to oppression; and the character which could bear

bear such insult was unworthy to reign over others, or to know what it was to be free and independent: the people too, who could be content to submit to such insult, could only be fit for the slavery, which was so imperiously imposed. Happily for the people of Israel they were not then ripe for so wretched a condition. Being called together, with all the elders of their land, by their king; who stated to them the several demands of the enemy then encamped against them, and how far he had acquiesced, they all said unto him with a firm and manly dignity, *hearken not unto him, nor consent.* Ahab seems to have had a degree of pusillanimity in his nature, for notwithstanding the firmness of determination in the rulers and people at large, the answer he sent back by the messengers of Benhadad was rather qualified, and more apologetic than bold and decisive; *tell my lord the king, all that thou didst send for to thy servant at the first, I will do; but this thing I may not do.* No doubt, he looked only to the greater multitudes of the hosts in array against him. And the king of Syria, confiding in what the king of Israel dreaded, elated too by an imperiousness of nature as well as of military strength, readily concluded that intercourse by a last message, which left no further insolence or threat to be added; *the gods do so to me, and*
more

more also, if the dust of Samaria shall suffice for handfuls for all the people that follow me. Whether Ahab was indebted to his own understanding, or to the suggestions of divine wisdom in the final answer he sent to such a threat, is not very material; the wisdom of it is most striking, and sublime—tell him, let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.

WHAT followed? for things were then brought to a crisis. To meet his enemy the king of Israel was compelled; but with so inferior a force, that he had but two hundred and thirty two young men of the princes of the provinces to lead on his army, amounting only to seven thousand, against the immense multitudes of the Syrians. With such a handful of men, but at the same time, it must not be forgotten, with the private encouragement of a prophet, he took the field, while Benhadad and the two and thirty kings with him were dissolutely drinking to excess in the pavilions, confiding in the superior number of their forces, which were nevertheless so completely discomfited, that even the king of Syria himself was indebted to the speed of his horse for his escape. So that expedition ended, verifying so far the truth and wholesome advice of Ahab's answer recorded in the text.

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BUT we must follow him and the king of Syria a little further, to see the lesson comprized in that answer completely illustrated. The expedition, which had failed so shamefully, was resumed the next year, and with such superior numbers that *the Syrians filled the country*, while the children of Israel that pitched before them were comparatively *like two little flocks of kids*. Nevertheless those diminutive numbers *slew of the Syrians an hundred thousand footmen in one day*; and of the rest who fled into their capital, *a wall fell on seven and twenty thousand*, and crushed them in a moment; Benhadad himself having escaped *and bidden himself in an inner chamber in the city*.

IN that most humiliated condition let us now see the insolent character who had before declared that *all the dust of Samaria should not suffice for bandfuls for all the people that followed him*. He became as meanly suppliant for mercy, as he had been swollen with pride, and intemperate in threats. *He sent his servants girded with sackcloths on their loins, and with ropes on their heads, to the king of Israel*, hoping that in the clemency, which he affected to speak of with encomium as *marking the kings of the house of Israel*, he might be permitted to come into the presence of Ahab, to throw himself at his feet, to restore all that he and his fathers

had

had taken from the children of Israel, to give up the city of Damascus to Ahab's power, and to receive his life as a boon from the hands of that sovereign. He was not much mistaken in the character on whom he threw himself; he obtained all that he sought; altho' the Almighty soon shewed to Ahab by a most striking incident that he had gone much further in his concessions than could reasonably have been expected from him, and further than was consistent with the divine intention. Enough however had passed in the surprising changes of fortune which had attended both the Syrians and the children of Israel in a very short space of time, to teach the former, if they were willing to be taught, that *the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong*, and to comfort the latter with a happy experience that a steady perseverance in just defence has many resources and favourable turns in the progress of events, which are either unknown or providentially denied to those whose steps are marked by insolent and arbitrary aggression, and that in the proverbial language of Ahab, it becomes not *him who girdeth on his harness to boast himself as he that putteth it off*.

IT diminishes not in any degree the force or the extent of that excellent moral, that they in whose favour events turned up so very advantageously;

vantageously, and contrary to first appearances, were the peculiar people of God, and as such were privately encouraged by a prophet, and were assisted by a special providence bringing down an immense wall on the heads of seven and twenty thousand of their enemies at once. All, whose conduct is worthy of divine protection, may hope to find it: they, whose arms are taken up as much in the spirit of just defence as those of the Israelites were in the instance above recited, may trust to find themselves in the issue so far a peculiar people of God as not to be forsaken by him in the conflict. If they have not a prophet to advise and encourage them, they have their own hearts to consult, which if honestly consulted, whether they have any sinister designs or not, will become to them a prophet, and afford to them every animating consolation which can be needful for honest men. If the providence of God does not so signally interpose as to crush a great part of their enemies by the fall of an immense building, yet infinite are the ways by which he may turn events in their favour, either by those unexpected advantages against which no calculation or policy can guard, or by making the measures of their enemies big with their own destruction.

IT is true, that they who engage in what may be pronounced a just defence, must not always expect to put off the harness of war in triumph. In private life the Almighty permits innocent and good men to suffer severely, and even to be crushed by misfortunes. And so in the strife of nations thousands of valuable individuals must be distressed and sacrificed, and thousands of worthy families must be undone. In suffering this in both cases the divine providence moves on one and the same principle, consulting what is best for the general good of this whole habitable globe, and especially if in his wisdom he has destined to make any important changes in the societies of which it is composed. But as those divine counsels can never be known to us in their progress, nor until they have been developed and cleared up by established events, what have we to do in the mean time but to take care of ourselves? to see that our conduct is right, and, as far as our influence can go, that our cause may be supported on such principles as Heaven can look on with favour; to hope that our days of darkness, if they visit us, may be soon succeeded by more halcyon seasons; and if the enemy should carry all before him for a while, to tell him in a modest and humble confidence in the God of battles,

that

that it is time enough to boast of his successes, and to call them his own, when *his harness is put off?*

ON these grounds we trust that we may look up to heaven with some consolations of hope in the present contest. Already the tide of things has begun to turn in our favour; an earnest of better fortune has been given to us; and the enemy has been taught by many checks that it is too soon for him who has not *put off his harness* to boast of what he has done, or what he has gained. In the present position of the contest on our side, wherever things looked dark or unfavourable, most certainly they have brightened up into a better aspect. We were threatned with invasion, so formidable that distrust began to spread. And now that is one of the last distrusts we feel; such has been the public voice, and the public strength combined to meet it, that we are happily relieved from anxiety on that account. Those threats were put into execution in our sister-kingdom; but by the happy arrangements of our naval power, or by the distrust of our enemies in their own success, they have been executed with such inefficacy, that they who were committed to those desperate expeditions have become a sacrifice to their

own temerity by death or captivity. The acquisitions they had gained, or at least the confederacies they had formed abroad, seem to be starting from them before they have been matured and fixed: the impressions which they had made by their disorganizing philosophy on the principles of various people have been for some time losing their hold: and the subjugation, in which some have been more notoriously held in consequence of being connected with their tyranny, seems to be giving way every hour to the return of a more independent spirit, altho' it be thro' the unhappy but inevitable medium of sore and intestine convulsions. By some means or other, all who have been brought into their trammels seem to have become sensible, that they could only be ruined by being connected with their policy; and therefore like a spring relieved from an unnatural pressure, they have returned as soon as they could to their first bent. It is not only in foreign countries that we can speak of these pleasing renovations in sentiments and attachments; they meet us, and we embrace them with joy, at home; even the poor in mind, and the superficially instructed, begin to see thro' the flimsy texture and the dangerous tendency of those principles, with which our
enemies

enemies have laboured to infect, for the purpose of unsettling, every civilized society.

AND who can speak with more truth than we ourselves of having contributed to those salutary changes, as far as they have hitherto appeared? Who with more propriety than we can call the attention of our enemy to the excellent lesson in the text, and *tell him, let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off?* Under the blessing of divine providence it is owing to us in a more eminent manner, and to our exertions, that others who have suffered by the progress of our enemies have been brought to reason on the principles suggested in that lesson, and that they have shewn a disposition at least to pause in their submissions, or more openly to act upon the hopes with which that lesson would encourage them. The resources of this country, small as it is among the nations of the earth, and even of Europe, are vast; and the characteristic vigour in the minds of its people is not less distinguished than its other resources. It was never considered in past times as abounding in military forces, or as capable of bringing numerous armies into the field; and in some periods by such an erroneous estimation, or by a more erroneous policy, foreigners have

have been taken into our pay, and to defend us from hostile invasion: But now we have come to know more of our real strength; the voluntary spirit of the people has formed armies, and is daily encreasing them, not only more numerous than any former calculations had supposed, but equal to repel any foreign attacks upon this island, and sufficient in all appearance to have induced the enemy to abandon the invasion he had planned. It is due to that voluntary spirit of our people to say this, and to applaud with gratitude those honourable associations, to which we are so much indebted for our present domestic security. Our navy, the natural bulwark of our insular situation, has done more, not only by protecting our coasts from every approach of our nearest and worst enemy, by blocking up their fleets and those of all their allies, however distant, or rendering it perilous for them to visit the seas, but by atchieving exploits in the destruction of their expeditions, which have surpassed all that the naval history even of this country has recorded, and have afforded us the reasonable hope that by pushing our marine strength to its full vigour and extent we may yet effect the happy deliverance of Europe from the tyranny of our enemies, and bring the present contest to a better issue than was
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sometime expected. From these exertions what other effects could follow than those which have followed in the revival of public confidence and public credit at home, in the production of resources which at one time we knew not or thought not that we possessed, in the prospects of more improved advantages accruing to us, and in the better confidence with which others have been inspired to do themselves justice, to make a firmer stand, or at least not to sink too abjectly under the imperious demands of the common enemy? What less instructive lesson could other powers derive from those comforting changes in our prospects than that with which we ourselves had been taught, to tell the enemy, *let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off?* Precious as the idea of peace may be, and is, to every humane mind, yet if that cannot be obtained without those sacrifices on our part which would hinder it from being either cordial or lasting, who would not think that the advantages, which our superiority at sea has given us, and the prospects of distressing our enemy in that way which have been opened to us, should be pursued to their best effects? in short, who would not think that the offers, which we may reasonably consider divine providence as thus making to us, of terminating
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the present contest with less mischief, if not with full glory, to ourselves, should be embraced, and cherished, and cultivated with prudence and firmness, rather than be hastily and capriciously abandoned?

For those signal successes, which have proved so salutary to ourselves, altho' we must sigh for the many worthy men who have fallen on our side, and for the thousands of our enemies too who have been consigned to the deep in instant destruction, we are now assembled to return our sincere thanks to that divine Providence, which has thus vouchsafed to guard our interests and our safety. And let it be the warm thanksgiving of our hearts, hoping that in his divine wisdom he will make those events, which may seem to prolong or to widen the miseries of war, contributory to the restoration of that peace, for which, as the disciples of his blessed Son, who came to bring it from Heaven, and who left it as his last legacy upon earth, we must never cease to pray, and that it might if possible be established for ever among the sons of men.

LOOKING on the mournful scenes of numerous families, whose supporters or dearest connexions have perished in those naval engagements, which have contributed so much

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to our security or national glory, we cannot but be anxious for a speedy termination to those scenes of woe. In the mean time we, who are benefited as a people by those events which have become the sources of affliction to them as individuals, or as families, and who ought, if we can, to spare something from our easier situation for their sakes, may lighten in some degree the afflictions which they endure, by encreasing the fund from which they may draw relief and assistance under the hardships of their situation. That fund has been most generously opened in particular parts of this great City, to the infinite honour of those who have begun it. But the candidates for a participation of it are too numerous to leave the supposition that it can yet be adequate to dispense what would be felt as a sensible comfort to all. Let me therefore recommend it to you on this occasion to add your mite to the generous purposes of that fund. On no occasion can we do that more properly than when we are prostrated before the Almighty in thankfulness for his mercies to ourselves. Let us then shew him that we feel for the distressed situation of others, while we adore him for averting distresses from ourselves. Charity is evermore a fit concomitant of pious exercise, and a test of piety which will rise as in-

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cence to the throne of grace and mercy. Those, who have suffered on these occasions, have every claim on your beneficence, if you estimate as you ought the advantages before you. Tell the brave men, who serve in our Navy, "they who are most dear to you shall be dear to us; your wives and children, and those who have depended on you for support, shall find that support in our gratitude for your services"; tell them this, and make it good, and altho' their valour needs no incentive, nor their love of their country any spur, both will swell into a glorious and invincible enthusiasm; they will perform new wonders of naval skill in that stupendous mechanism, which they have so astonishingly under their command; they will throw their ships thro' a needle, if so the enemy is only to be reached, and their country to be saved. What you give shall be conveyed to those who have taken upon themselves this labour of love in apportioning the general bounty to the individual circumstances of those for whom it is given. And may the God of everlasting love look down with his most gracious acceptance on what you shall now bestow upon his' necessitous and afflicted creatures, and make it the source of new and encreased blessings to yourselves and your country!

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